

820.7 Educ.
N44

The English Leaflet

THE ENGLISH LEAFLET is published at Boston, by the New England Association of Teachers of English. Subscription price, One Dollar. Secretary-Treasurer, A. B. DeMille, Winthrop, Mass. Editor, Charles Swain Thomas, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Vol. XXIV

APRIL, 1925

Number 212

TEACHING

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

JOSEPHINE A. LANE

Bridgeport High School

APR 8 1925

I

As I make use of *The Ancient Mariner* in my effort to arouse in tenth-grade boys an interest in poetry, I have decided to explain, in a concrete manner, just what I emphasize in this poem which, to me, seems the most suitable one I know for the purpose in view.

Few normal boys there are, I imagine, who have not delighted in out-of-door tramps interspersed with "yarns," especially when each fellow could contribute "one better" than that which preceded. Using this common interest as a link, I send my boys off to the library to discover how two "grown-up boys," Wordsworth and Coleridge, indulged in a like recreation. I also ask them to search out the exact definition of the word "rime", to try to think out Coleridge's reason for employing the word in the title of the poem, and to read the entire poem *aloud*, "just to hear the music."

To these requests the response is so general and satisfying that our next meeting is largely given over to conversation. Not only does this cover the points asked, but also it touches incidents in the lives of the two poets, Coleridge's sources of information as used in the poem, the magical imaginative power of a man who could render the supernatural perfectly credible, and the adroitness shown in having an Ancient Mariner tell the rime, so that our credulity may in no wise be taxed. In fact, the offerings are so generous that I can barely allow myself time to read and obtain comments on

the first few stanzas. Some comments I do make, as signposts along the road to be traveled on succeeding days.

After having read the first five stanzas, I seek for interpretations. In due time, changing verb tenses, archaic forms, and carelessly observed quotation-marks are straightened out. The mesmeric influence of the "glittering eye" begins to exert its fascination upon the pupils as it exerted a like power over the Wedding-Guest. A question elicits the information that most of the boys have, at some time, held "a three years' child" breathlessly attentive to some story of their own.

The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child.

Two or three times I read the lines—softly. Gradually, the "sh! sh," uttered to a child, comes to thought. The pupils understand then how "The Mariner hath his will."

"Why 'one of three'?" I ask. And why a 'Wedding-Guest,' especially the 'next of kin'?"

Again I question, "Why do these men continue to 'hear the merry din'?"

The interrogations have, so far, been quite simple. The next ones demand more careful thinking.

"Why does the Mariner seem to have a 'skinny hand'? Why is he called a 'graybeard loon'?"

When these inquiries have been answered, I proceed, "How many of you can *see* 'the ancient Mariner' well enough to draw his picture for us? Those who can will please have a snap-shot of him ready for us, to-morrow." "Handwork helps to quicken the eye."

"Do you notice that the author has repeated anything in these five stanzas? If so, what, and why?"

"Why does the tense change so frequently?"

Such are the points brought into the focus of attention on the first day.

After the first lesson the students are responsible for "seeing" all they can in each stanza, during their preparation hours. In class we follow, in general, the method of allowing different pupils to read aloud, and then to comment upon, groups of stanzas taken successively. After each pupil recites, any member of the class may make additional con-

tributions. In a day or two various pupils bring in, of their own accord, written comments which they have ferreted out in order to enrich our fund of knowledge. Pictured editions appear. Like the Wedding-Guest we are shut out from the wedding-feast; but there is nothing, except our own laziness in preparing them, which can help us from having daily symposiums of our own.

As the statements which I have thus far made are, without doubt, sufficient to illustrate the manner in which we like to handle our problems, I shall, hereafter, devote my attention entirely to the matter which we find most interesting.

The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light-house top.

In this stanza, and in those which immediately follow it, the quickness of action is forcefully and clearly brought out by the use of internal rhymes, brevity of phrasing, and the repetition of phrases in which but one word is changed. In the space of four lines an entire day is made to pass; in two stanzas the ship has been carried from the port of embarkation to the equator. Such speed would make a modern aviator snarl with envy.

At this point in the story the magnetic power of the Mariner is thoroughly tested. The Wedding-Guest beats his breast as the notes of the bassoon remind him of the marriage which he is missing. Alas! "He can not choose but hear."

The personification of the sun, and the ancient ballad style, revived in the old ballad simile, "Red as a rose is she," may require some sentences of explanation. The mention of the bassoon, suggested by an instrument owned by one of Coleridge's patrons, and the allusion to the "merry minstrels" are interesting to musically inclined individuals. By this time, usually, the repetitions are flashing their own signals as plainly as do "dummy policemen." All "can not choose but" *see*.

The treatment of the passage describing "the ship drawn by a storm toward the south pole, the land of ice and of fearful sounds, where no living thing was to be seen" is

alluring. The exact use of words, the compression of thought, the emphasis gained by skillful repetition, and the vividness of similes, metaphors, and personification are all details worth a pause.

Quite as interesting as the figures of speech is the effective consonantal and vowel placement in passage like the following:

And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong;
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

It cracked and growled, and roared, and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

The ice did split with a thunder-fit.

I know of nothing more effective, when well read, than the first selection which I have just written. The howl of the wind, produced by the long vowels in conjunction with the *n's*, *m's*, and *g's* interspersed with the gusty slaps of the *d's*, *th's*, *st's*, *bl*, *tyr*, *ck*, *k*, *gs*, and *ch*, is startlingly realistic. The second set of lines allows us to hear the cakes of ice grind together, while the third *splits* them before our very eyes and ears. Such workmanship, when it is understood, seems to call forth the admiration of every student.

The entrance of the Albatross is, indeed, next hailed with joy. Recent pictures in the "National Geographic Magazine" make visualization easy; and the accompanying descriptions confirm the friendly actions of the birds as they are portrayed in the lines:

The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner's hollo!

From time to time such unusual words as "eftsoons," "thorough," "had eat," "wist," "gramercy," and "cross-bow" are noted as being happily in keeping with the style of the *ancient* Mariner himself. Again, the purposes of both reality and magic are subserved at will by the use of the numerical terms three, seven, nine, four times fifty, and thrice. Strange it is what a strong flavor a single word wisely added can lend!

And now comes a dramatic moment, breaking in upon

the light joyousness and silent peace of the days while the Albatross played with the sailors or

perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white moon-shine.

"God save thee, Ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!
Why look'st thou so?"—With my cross-bow,
I shot the Albatross.

Anticipating the almost electrical shock which a proper reading of these passages may give, the teacher may well read them to the class.

II

At the beginning of part two the repetition is so adroitly varied as to need a second glance, for now the south pole is rounded and the equator is approached from the opposite direction. As if prophetically, even external circumstances are reversed. The changed attitude of the sailors gives opportunity for a slight but enlightening digression on the mutability of human opinion. Even the use of onomatopœia here accentuates the feeling of reversal.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

Note the sense of speed and the suggestion of puffs of light wind, secured by the consonants *f*, *b*, *th*, *wh*, *t*, *fl* in combination with quick, light vowels; contrast also the heavy, falling sensation and the sense of protracted time in the consonants *dn*, *dr*, *pt*, *br*, *d*, *d*, *d*, etc., used with the lengthened vowel sounds in the second stanza. By placing his hand under his chin as one reads, one feels the steady *drop* more easily. Whatever vivifies the student's conception of the channels of poetic appeal is worth investigation.

Here, as elsewhere throughout the poem, calling attention

to the multitude of charmingly colorful pictures seems as needless as would a similar procedure in an art gallery. Yet I find these pictures need to be connected with those of individual experience. One Monday, some weeks after finishing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a boy came in to ask me whether or not, on the preceding Saturday, I had noticed in the copper sky, the bloody sun at noon, no bigger than the moon.

The phenomenon had been especially noted in our study. The word-painting had made the impression. The "idle ship" and the illimitable stretch of water, too, made quite an impression. Perhaps no more sincere tribute was ever paid to poetic power than that expressed when another boy suddenly arose in unfeigned distress, and said, "Oh, this just couldn't be; it's too horrible to think of." However, facts gathered from outside reading supported the plausibility of Coleridge's statements. There is, in truth, a belt of calm into which the currents sweep refuse; here it seems as if the very deep does rot. General science reading bears testimony to the existence of the "death-fires," as here pictured. Thus, by a careful consideration of the pictures, we not only learn to *see* more clearly but we also discover the value of general knowledge.

When we have considered the mental and physical torment which leads up to the hanging of the Albatross about the Mariner's neck, I stop to consider the thread of unity which the killing of the Albatross gives to the entire poem. Each part closes with some allusion to this deed. Thus, widely as our imaginations range about the central point, we are held, as it were, tethered.

III

As in "Day after day," in Part II, so here in Part III the power of suggestion is thrice used with great success in the repeated expression "a weary time." In perfect keeping with this indefinite sense of time is the suspense felt in the reader's consciousness from the time the Mariner first discerns a vague "something in the sky" until, with his mouth moistened by the blood sucked from his own arm, he cries, "A sail! a sail!"

Some slight sympathy with the state of utter drought felt by the sailors may be aroused by several quick repetitions of the words "black lips baked," for in an amazingly short time one's own lips come to feel swollen and dry. We wonder whether the use of this group of labials is in any way connected with the experience which gave birth to the expression, "they for joy did grin." These observations relate personal experience to the realm of fiction as a great store-house of material from which to draw "such stuff as dreams are made of."

The horror, caused by the vividness of the experiences just spoken of, increases with the coming of the skeleton ship. Supernatural manifestations, vivid comparisons, condensation, and dreadful proper names—all these are used to heighten the effect. At length,

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark.

In such a setting it is not hard both to see and to hear the sailors as

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

IV

An interruption by the terrified Wedding-Guest opens Part IV with thrilling suddenness. The simile used by him is excellent. Nor is our sense of excitement entirely allayed by the Mariner's assurance that he is himself no ghost. Throughout the poem dramatic and lyric effects are used as the emotional need dictates.

The contrast supplied in the next stanza is superb.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!

The only activity is that of a soul writhing in its agony. We see it laid bare.

From these lines onward to the end of the section, a mental struggle is depicted. The study of it offers one of comparatively few chances to talk with a perfect frankness, free from all sentimentality, of that state of consciousness which alone can be at one with the Father in the communion which

is prayer. The necessity of replacing suggestions of hatred, guilt, envy, and kindred emotions with that unconstrained, unselfish love which alone entitles us to the peace of God is shown with marvelous simplicity and beauty. The overwhelming weight of a heart estranged from the Father is implied in lines rich in their tactile imagery.

I closed my lids, and kept them closed,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

This horror, the sight of the dead men, is intensely pictured in the next two stanzas. Following these, and suggesting the mental change about to take place in the Mariner, is a passage of exquisite imagery. Personally, I never neglect to make an effort to transfer some of the admiration aroused by the rich colorfulness of the water-snake to an admiration for the beauty of our own harmless reptiles. I take no hypocritical stand. I confess my own present aversion to snakes; but I also confess my shame. The results have been strange; but there have been results—and good ones.

V

Here, I take a few moments in discovering the motives of the appeal to Christ (lines 123 and 487), to the mother of Jesus (lines 178 and 294), and to the Lord (lines 506 and 538). Each is significant.

Following these comments, the Mariner's return to a normal state, the storm, and the work of the spirit crew, are each treated very briefly.

The first required memory work is this gem of pictured melody:

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Another one of the author's wonderful contrasts occurs in the comparison of the smoothness of the motion of the ship, both when being guided and after being left by the spirit, with the "short, uneasy motion" before, "like a pawing horse let go, she made a sudden bound." Whether due to present day unfamiliarity with horses or to lack of sailing experience or to imperfect visualization, I do not know; but, for some reason this figure seems to need explanation.

The conversation of the spirits at the end of Part V recalls the Mariner's change of consciousness and emphasizes the tenderness of genuine love. "As a man sows, so shall he reap," and "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"—these sentences are illustrated, as it were, for us. A wise teacher stays not too long to drive home morals. Young people are grateful enough to discover guide-posts to conduct and to follow them when discovered; but they prefer to feel that they themselves make the discoveries.

VI

The conversation and disappearance of the spirits, the breaking of the curse in the dead men's eyes, the return of a natural breeze, and the sight of the light-house top, the hill, the kirk, and his own countree give almost a perfectly rounded balance to the structure of the rime.

The silence and the unruffled calmness of the moonlit harbor give an atmosphere rarely appropriate for the departure of the seraph-men in flames of light. Again, an abrupt transition occurs. Oars dash in the water; the pilot calls out cheerily. Behold the Pilot, the Pilot's boy, and the Hermit! From the realm of the supernatural as speedy a

transition is made back to this world's affairs as was made when the Mariner first held *us* "with his glittering eye."

Back to earth we are, the earth of the five senses where the Hermit

kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak stump.

No sooner do we feel, in imagination, the delightful coolness and resiliency of the moss, than we overhear the landsmen discuss the lights just seen on the ship. We hear of their wonder at the planks and sails which look, so the Hermit says, like

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along;
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owllet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the shoe-wolf's young.

Surely, we are back to solid earth!

One more tremendous shock yet remains, one last stroke of the supernatural, as the bay splits; the ship sinks; and the Mariner floats on the water. Then before the Pilot's boat begins to whirl about and about, from the suction, the Mariner is pulled in. That is powerful descriptive-narration.

Coleridge next uses dramatic portrayal excellently. As he at first made the Mariner's personality real to us through its effect upon the Wedding-Guest, so now we feel its weirdness even more by its effect upon the Pilot, who shrieks; upon the Hermit, who prays; and upon the Pilot's boy, who, thinking he sees the Devil, goes crazy. There is hardly a finer example in all literature of the indirect method of portrayal of a character.

At last, to complete the symmetry of development, we learn why, and to whom, the Mariner is constrained to tell his tale; and we behold once more the bridal party—the ceremony now ended.

The lesson of the poem, because of the beauty of its phrasing, must be memorized:

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

In his contemplation of such all-encompassing, universal love, the Wedding-Guest is no longer attracted by the materialistic delights of the wedding-party. With master craftsmanship Coleridge has rounded the plan of his story into an absolute sphere. I think the perfection of the structure is noteworthy.

My paper would be incomplete without reference to two further topics—the metrical form of the poem and the glosses. As to the former, we talk of rhyme and rhythm when and how we please. Altogether, however, we scan lines enough so that few of those containing irregularities escape someone's attention. Such lines are brought to the notice of all. With reference to the glosses, I wish only to say that we read them as a unit as well as in sections. I endeavor to use them as models in our later attempt to state concisely the main thoughts of other poems.

The last assignment is a request that the entire poem be read aloud and that passages, individually selected, of from ten to twenty lines in length, be memorized. The variety of the selections chosen and the intensity of feeling shown during the recital of them, convince me of the depth of the impressions that have been made.

After finishing our work in poetry, one lad wrote: "English has meant a great deal to me this term. I have literally been resurrected from the dead during the past months. For the first time in my life I have learned to read a book; and that is so despite the fact that I have frequented libraries for the past four years. As to poetry, I never dreamed what it had stored away for me to enjoy. I only thought of it as words."

His expression was a bit unusual; but his feeling was like that of others in the class.

A WORD IN SEASON

There are two ways of securing new members for an organization such as ours. One is the printed circular, the other the spoken word. The circular too often is laid respectfully on the shelf—to accumulate dust, to become a stone in the place which is paved with good intentions. The spoken word, however, carries with it a sense of personal interest, and very often wins those whose inclinations have not been stirred before.

We need more members. If each one of us would make the effort to bring in at least one wanderer to the fold, our numbers would be doubled and our field of usefulness correspondingly increased. According to the Constitution, our lists are open to "any teacher of English, or anyone who is interested in the furtherance of good English teaching." To all such we believe that the Association offers both intellectual entertainment and practical help.

The Secretary will be glad to send membership blanks to any who ask for them, or to add to our list the names of those who write to him directly. The annual fee of one dollar includes subscription to *The English Leaflet*, which is sent to all members each month from October to June.

Why not test the efficacy of the spoken word?

A. B. DeM.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Aftermath of the Spring Meeting

Sometimes we come away from a meeting of teachers with the idea that attendance had yielded little in the way of practical help or professional spirit. No new ideas had been presented and the old ideas were not presented in a way to arouse enthusiasm or clarify nebulous thinking. We then try to justify the continuance of such gatherings by reassuring ourselves that after all there is a measurable advance in our educational thought since we first got the habit of attending meetings of this type. An individual meeting may be woefully fatuous, but the cumulative results warrant our continued allegiance and support of the organization.

No such process of intellection is necessary with the meet-

ings of the New England Association of Teachers of English. A poor program would be an anomaly. Certainly those who heard Mr. Turner F. Garner discuss Commercial English were led to a firmer conviction that Business English in its essentials is no different from any other kind of English. An attempt to develop an automatism that will secure the habitually correct form and at the same time develop the power of clear thinking, comprise the salient objectives. Professor Alfred D. Sheffield's admirable presentation of the advantages to be derived from organized discussion revealed ways in which we could all apply his principles to our own classroom work. Incidentally it made us wonder why some of our United States senators had not grasped and practiced the idea.

Miss Clara B. Shaw and Mr. Augustus D. Zanzig effectively enforced an idea that needs continually to be stressed—the principle of correlation in our school work. Neither English nor any other subject can be thought of as a unit unrelated to other curriculum units. The concrete methods which each of these speakers adopted, brought this out most effectively.

The program at the Brunswick—both in its prandial and in its post-prandial aspects—was perfect in every way. Satisfying and savory as was the luncheon itself, it was Mr. Whiting's brief "three hour" talk that provided the choicest morsels. It was far more than entertaining; it enforced upon us the important truth that the best instruction in English is not necessarily given in the formal classroom period. In Mr. Whiting's case it was imparted by a father whose ideas of diction and literature enforced a high standard of taste. No one living in that atmosphere could escape the righteousness of that influence. The speaker's emphasis upon that point doubtless suggested to many of those present whether or not we in our separate ways and in our separate classrooms are creating lines of influence that will, even waveringly, parallel that.

To Professor Gay, who was largely responsible for arranging the program, to Mr. Orren H. Smith, who planned the details of the dinner, and to the Executive Committee, who sponsored the whole, the members of the Association are particularly grateful.

LITERATURE IN THE SCHOOLS

By Marian A. Dogherty

Just Published

Mailing-Price \$1.00

Miss Dogherty, author of *LITERATURE IN THE SCHOOLS*, is a teacher in one of the Junior High Schools of Boston. The message which she has for her fellow-teachers is best set forth in her own words in the introduction:

In the teaching of literature we have one particular goal, which never varies. That one end, the fulfillment of which is fixed in the distant future, is the relation which the pupil is going to have toward books by and by. The literature teacher is there to create; to create book-lovers.

I have a friend who some time ago asked me this question, "Why don't school people who write books just go along and say in an interesting way what they have to write." I can now tell him that I have found his book in 'Literature in the Schools.' I hope that every school teacher in Virginia will possess a copy. It is one of the most stimulating educational books that I have seen for a long time. It is spilling over with fine suggestions for the classroom teacher.

—C. J. Heatwole, Editor of "Virginia Journal of Education."

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

34 Beacon Street

Boston

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

At Bread Loaf Inn in the Green Mountains

June 30—August 14, 1925

COURSES

Creative Writing, The Teaching of English, Literary Interpretation, Browning, The Appreciation of Literature, The Short Story, The American Novel, Modern Drama, American Literature, Contemporary Poetry, Theory of Drama, Theory of Stage Design, Laboratory in Play Production.

The list of special lecturers includes the following: Hamlin Garland, Louis Untermeyer, Marguerite Wilkinson, F. L. Pattee, John Farrar, Carl Sandburg, and Rollo W. Brown.

For bulletins, address

HELEN W. BLANCHARD, Secretary,

SEVENTEENTH SUMMER SESSION

MIDDLEBURY

VERMONT

DEFINITE RESULTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

"Again and again in checking up a student's work, I have noted the definiteness of reply which can always be gained from one taking this course. He invariably knows just where he stands, and can indicate at once whether he is or is not keeping pace with the other members of the class. In contrast with the uncertain information which I often gather in questioning of this kind this has been so marked as to be worth noting."

From a letter written by a teacher in the Jefferson High School, Los Angeles, where, for several years before it appeared in book form, a test was made of

STUDIES IN GRAMMAR

By Mabel C. Hermans

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

COLLEGE GRADUATES

Who know the meaning of thoroughness and who take pride in scholarly accuracy are in special demand for literary and editorial work of a high character.

We are prepared to give by correspondence

A Complete Professional Training

to a limited number of suitable candidates who are interested in better English and who wish to fit themselves for a second profession. Those having higher degrees will find the course eminently attractive and advantageous.

For further information address

THE MAWSON EDITORIAL SCHOOL

25 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts

WHY

do all roads lead to

TANNER'S COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

WHY has this book attained the phenomenal record in two years after publication of over 2,000 adoptions? Simply because it approaches more nearly than any other of its kind the finest ideals, methods, and materials of the modern course in English. Any of the 2,000 teachers who use it will tell you so.

GINN AND COMPANY

15 Ashburton Place, Boston

You can learn the craftsmanship of

SHORT-STORY WRITING

An avocation for professional men and women
A profession for younger men and women

JOHN GALLISHAW

offers Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced Courses, which include both individual and class instruction. The classes, limited in enrollment, meet once each week for three months, and the work is interesting and profitable. Publishers demand well-written stories. Mr. Gallishaw helps you meet this demand.

Reservations are now being made for day and evening classes. The Spring Courses begin in March.

The six-week Summer Courses begin in July.

Individual Instruction and Manuscript Criticism Service by appointment.

Introductory Course by Mail

Address the Secretary for further information

THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL OF CREATIVE WRITING

Harvard Square, Cambridge, Mass.

Tel. Porter 1358-M